



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks News Release

For Immediate Release: June 4, 2014

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Special Presentation—“Wilderness Speaks: Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act” on June 13

SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS, THREE RIVERS, CALIFORNIA— Edward Zahniser, son of the primary author of the Wilderness Act of 1964, will speak at the Three Rivers Arts Center on June 13, from 7-8 p.m. The Arts Center is located along the North Fork Road, just off Highway 198 in Three Rivers, California. This free public event is sponsored by the Sequoia Natural History Association.

Poet, editor, and writer Ed Zahniser grew up as his father hammered out over 60 revisions of the wilderness legislation between January 1956 and May 1964. Howard Zahniser died four months before President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Wilderness Preservation System Act into law on September 3, 1964. Ed’s mother, Alice Zahniser, attended the ceremony in the White House Rose Garden on her husband’s behalf.

The original Wilderness Act preserved 9.1 million acres of federal public lands. Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System preserves 109.5 million acres. The National Park Service, other federal agencies, and the public continue to interpret the Wilderness Act and its mandate to protect natural conditions and wilderness character. The Wilderness Act empowered ordinary citizens to propose and shape the designation of new wilderness areas on the public lands that all Americans own in common.

Ed Zahniser’s visit to Three Rivers offers an unusual chance to hear a personal perspective on this landmark public land law. A major news weekly wrote that the language of the Wilderness Act “...tiptoes as close to poetry as legalese ever comes.” Ed shares insights into his father’s literary mentors and agonizing word choices.

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Ed Zahniser is youngest of the four children of Howard and Alice Zahniser. Howard Zahniser (1906–1964) was primary author of and chief lobbyist for the National Wilderness Preservation System Act of 1964. Ed has spoken about wilderness and conservation topics at universities, wilderness conferences, federal agency trainings, the George Wright Society, and the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Ed retired in 2013 as senior writer-editor with the National Park Service Publications Group in Harpers Ferry, WV. In May 2014, he received the U.S. Department of the Interior Distinguished Service Award and a New York State Wilderness 50th Steering Committee Wilderness Stewardship Award.

During the Clinton Administration, Ed completed research and wrote for NPS Director Roger Kennedy and his deputy, John Reynolds, as well as for the Office of the Secretary of the Interior. He has authored a dozen National Park Service Handbooks about parks, including Sequoia and Kings Canyon, Yosemite, Great Smoky Mountains, Grand Teton, and National Park Service sites in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Ed is the editor of *Where Wilderness Preservation Began: Adirondack Writings of Howard Zahniser* and *Ways to the Wilderness: Summer 1956 Western Trip Journal* by Alice B. Zahniser. His poetry has been published in four books, five chapbooks, 10 anthologies, and over 150 poetry venues in the United States and United Kingdom.

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